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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 002495

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SUBJECT: UNDERGRADS FRET ABOUT JOBS AND DISCUSS TERROR DURING YOUTH CHALLENGE

REF: JEDDAH 02181

Classified By: ACTING CONSUL GENERAL CAROL KALIN
FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT. Conoff participated in an outdoor "Youth Challenge" competition on July 21 sponsored by the College of Business Administration (CBA) Youth Business Club and "Yalla Ya Shabbab" (roughly "Let's Go Guys"), a youth-oriented television program. On June 30, Conoff visited Hada Mountain, located between Mecca and Taif, with a group of CBA undergraduates who explored the mountain as part of a youth club (Reftel). Accompanying a larger group of undergraduate students from CBA and other Jeddah colleges on July 21, Conoff observed students race up the base of the mountain to complete the challenge. During the event, students fretted about their job prospects in Saudi Arabia, discussed the causes of terrorism, and advocated for greater political freedom in the Kingdom. The students' comments mirrored growing frustration with the employment picture in Saudi Arabia often expressed by young men their age. Their discussion of the causes of terrorism also highlights a rift between the Hejaz region and Saudis from other parts of the country, particularly the bedouin. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

JEDDAH UNDERGRADS WORRY ABOUT GETTING A JOB AFTER GRADUATION

12. (C) Conoff accompanied a group of Jeddah undergraduates on a "Youth Challenge" on July 21 sponsored by the CBA Youth Business Club and the youth-oriented MBC television program "Yalla Ya Shabbab." The young men raced up the base of Hada Mountain encountering snakes, wild monkeys, and thunderstorms in the hopes of receiving prizes for those who completed the challenge in the shortest amount of time. The participants, who were mostly between 18 and 24 years old, were largely Saudi, though some were citizens of Syria, Yemen, and other Arab countries. Almost all were born and raised in Saudi Arabia. The organizers of the event hoped to instill confidence and bolster the self-esteem of participants. A CBA student advisor stated he hoped to promote moral values through motivational speeches during the event. The student advisor reminded students to take breaks throughout the day at prayer times. Most of the students heeded his advice, praying together on the bare ground even when a mosque was not available.

13. (C) Throughout the day, the students expressed concerns about their employment prospects after graduation. "I will do anything. Give me anything--typing, secretary stuff-- to keep me busy," said one student who wished to work in the computer industry. "I don't know if I will get a job. The situation here is very hard and if you are not from the right family, it is hard to get a good job," another lamented. One Palestinian student worried about "Saudization," the SAG's attempts to bolster employment for Saudi citizens, stating "all the jobs I like are only for Saudis. It doesn't matter if you are born here."

STUDENTS BLAME BEDOUINS AND "AMERICAN AGENTS" FOR TERROR IN KINGDOM

14. (C) The young men were anxious to share their viewpoints on political issues with Conoff, with many focusing on terrorism in Saudi Arabia. Several students blamed "bedouins" for violence in the Kingdom. Indeed, the students were vocal in exhibiting prejudice against the bedouin. Several students used slurs they normally reserve for homosexuals in discussing them. Others blamed the bedouin for the country's problems and for discrimination against residents of the Hejaz who trace their roots from outside the Arabian Peninsula. "They think they are the original Saudis, and they hate everybody else," one student said. Generalizing, another student remarked, "Bedouins are stupid people. They are not educated, but somehow they have learned to make bombs." When Conoff mentioned that the bedouin are reputed for their generosity and hospitality, the students shook their heads. "I lived in the south (Asir Province) for five years. The bedouin there are really bad, and they want everyone else out of Saudi Arabia," one young man declared. "Riyadh is also full of these stupid people," another added.

15. (C) One student stated that he had read online statements that terrorists would not kill Muslims, and he criticized them for nevertheless killing Saudi police officers and Muslim LES during the December 6, 2004 attack on the Consulate. "We never had these problems in our country before. It all started with September 11. Sometimes we think American agents are doing this to us to punish us for Bin Laden," he said. His friend nodded in agreement.

16. (C) Another young man commented, "Sometimes, I wish I could send a message to President Bush with all that is in my heart." When told that he could send President Bush an e-mail on the White House website, he replied, "They would kill me here if I did that." Later the young man approached Conoff and stated, "I need to tell you the one thing we hate about our government is that they never let us speak our mind. This is the message I want you to tell President Bush."

17. (C) Another student criticized the lack of entertainment venues for young men given that many amusement parks and public venues attempt to restrict access to families and prevent young men from entering. "If they don't give us things to do, we will do bad things," he added.

UNDERGRADS EXPRESS HOPE FOR GREATER POLITICAL FREEDOM

18. (C) At the end of the day, the students ate dinner together in a private home in the town of al-Hada, located at the top of the mountain on the road to Taif. Sitting in a circle, the participants discussed the lessons learned on the challenge. They concluded the day by performing the evening "isha" prayer together. On the drive back to Jeddah, one group of students sang Arabic songs to the beat of rhythmic clapping and a traditional Yemeni drum. They took breaks from their singing to talk about the political situation in Saudi Arabia. "This government will never listen to anyone else. The Al Saud will never listen to us," the driver of the car stated. "We want a government like in America, where the government changes every four or five years," he said. "Yes, this will make sure that the leader works for the people because he will be scared he will lose his job," another student added.

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